



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources

Sustainable Recreation Work Group

CONNECTING YOU AND THE OUTDOORS

May 7, 2009

Cedarbrook Conference Center, SeaTac WA

Meeting Summary

Prepared by the Department of Natural Resources

Welcome and Introductions—Work Group

General Updates—Craig Partridge

- Craig offered words of thanks to Work Group members from Commissioner Goldmark as well as his continued interest in their work.
- James Donaldson has withdrawn from Chair and from his work on the group due to his commitments relating to the Seattle mayoral election in the fall.
- Due to budget constraints, DNR had to end its contract with Triangle Associates, which provided facilitation assistance.

Budget review—Mark Mauren, Recreation Program manager

DNR Recreation program took a significant cut during this year's budget process. The program's General Fund budget was cut by nearly 60 percent. In addition, DNR's Recreation Program had depended on approximately \$3 million dollars in each 2-year budget cycle from the NOVA grant program. This funding will not be available in the 09-11 biennium. Staff in DNR's Recreation Program will continue to work collaboratively with statewide organizations to develop creative ideas to address these significant cuts.

General Discussion on Telling DNR's Story—Work Group

Work Group members recognize the need to do a better job telling our distinctive story to the public, legislators, users, and potential supporters, specifically related to proposed funding ideas. There is a need to communicate the opportunities provided by the investments in DNR recreation as well as the program's administrative efficiency and credibility. Significant benefits can be realized if our partners help share this message especially as it relates to the support of the work group's final recommendations.

DISCUSSION: Funding Sources

Funding source option—User fees for road/parking/camping use

- Viewed as a possible short-term strategy.
- Realization that there isn't much revenue potential, but recognition that fees are a necessary foundation to show user-based financial support before asking for other funding sources.
- Fees need to be accompanied by significant user education efforts.
- Fees have some potential to positively relocate or curtail problem use. The implementation of fees could also direct negative or unlawful behavior to other places.
- There is still significant debate within the group about:
 - A fee plan that's limited to selected sites, for efficiency, or applied to broad areas, for less confusion.
 - Whether revenue from fees should be sought and implemented in a DNR-exclusive way, or sought, shared, and implemented in a shared arrangement with other providers, such as counties, and other state agencies.
- The idea of a very low fee spread over many users for experiences at valued locations/areas seemed to have traction with the work group members.

Funding source option—Create a new statutory trust land base

- Viewed as a long-term strategy.
- There seemed to be a caution/realistic view about this potential funding source relating to the challenges in implementation and the uncertain outcomes. However, there seemed to be a real sentiment that the context may have changed since the idea was defeated by the legislature in 2003.
- If the work group wants to pursue this idea, there would need to be:
 - An explicit and strenuous outreach strategy aimed at previous opponents/skeptics.
 - Greater clarity on the balance of goals for the new trust lands between revenue generation for recreation elsewhere and auxiliary conservation/recreation benefits from the new lands themselves.
- Acquisition strategy may allow for partnership with land conservancies or other private organizations to purchase/transfer development rights but still allow opportunity for lands to be "worked" and be used for recreation.
- Consider opportunities that may exist for buying out the trust interest and converting existing trust lands to a recreation trust.

Other funding source options:

- Lottery—viewed as a mid-term strategy
 - Not much additional potential to squeeze from this, except for multi-state Powerball, which should be investigated.
- NOVA funding—viewed as a mid-term strategy
 - Raising the percentage actually allocated to recreation is still a viable idea, recognizing likely opposition from transportation interests.

- Gaining new funding and protecting existing funding from diversion to other entities, would be helpful if the legislature could see the approved projects in advance of appropriating funds, as with Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program.
- The work group asked staff for additional ideas to consider.

DISCUSSION: Impacts of recreation on the environment

The work group wants staff to provide them with a finer-grained assessment about what the highest priorities are for DNR lands and uses that could be usefully addressed. For example, it would be helpful to have an assessment that sets a priorities on the basis of site sensitivity, use intensity, and how easily problems can be fixed. This also ties in with the prioritization of undesignated trails, as mentioned below. However, beyond vegetation/soil/water/fish impacts from trail use, noise is also an important issue. If we link the environmental impact issue to the undesignated trails issue, we can't lose track of noise. Effects on wildlife are also a concern.

DISCUSSION: How should DNR address undesignated user-built trails? (Access)

[Note: Background document on this discussion topic is available at:

www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/amp_rec_srwg_unauthorized_trail_options.pdf]

Work group members separated into breakout groups to discuss options for addressing undesignated trails. There were arguments for and against all three options, more or less as follows:

- **Option 1. Case-by-case evaluation**—This option is based on the reality that unauthorized trails are prohibited, and that DNR would take the lead on a site-by-site assessment of user-built trails and determine which trails could be brought up to standards and when.
Some members thought this option may be too coercive, but also maybe necessary, especially for some smaller, less complex areas.
- **Option 2. Planning**—DNR would conduct collaborative landscape planning prior to determining the fate of user-built trails.
Supported by members but recognized to be too expensive and unnecessary to apply to all 74 recreation landscapes. But it's understood to be a necessary approach in priority locations, especially heavy use areas (see below).
- **Option 3. User based**—DNR would acknowledge that many user-built trails could continue to exist, whether or not they currently meet DNR standards. DNR would focus attention on specific problem areas.
Some members felt this option may not promote the needed dialog with users and might even be an abdication. But it was also viewed as realistic in some areas, especially considering users' evident needs that are expressed by creation of unauthorized trails.

There was much discussion regarding the need to identify priority landscapes in the context of option 2, and also places where options 1 or 3 would be best. This was likened to forestland owners' [Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plans](#) (RMAP)—a worst-first concept. Landscape priorities could be based on site sensitivity (including complaints), use intensity, and how easily problems can be fixed (as with environmental impacts).

Real benefits could be realized by seeking major hands-on participation from local user groups, across different use types.

- Shared restoration projects and maybe a shared voice (like Tahuya).
- Education and dialog, including with youth (such as “students in the watershed”) needs to be a big part of these efforts.

There was also talk of a “green/yellow/red” system to warn users of worsening/improving conditions and possible DNR response, to help alter behavior and/or solicit help. The group also discussed escalating enforcement.

DNR staff will provide information to the work group regarding DNR road miles and land base that has access or doesn’t, including gate information.

Plan of work for summer and fall 2009

DNR staff will continue to:

- Respond to work group member requests for information, including continued work on funding strategies, access, environmental impacts, safety/liability, and education/enforcement.
- Frame work within the established group vision.
- Begin developing a strategy for sharing the work group’s final product. This involves the “Telling DNR’s Story” idea addressed earlier in this memo.
- Share videos of recreation experiences on DNR-managed lands.

Subgroup work will continue for funding and access and perhaps an additional topic will be added, which may combine safety/liability/education/enforcement.

This summer, in addition to staff work and subgroup work, members indicated they would try to visit new-to-them DNR sites and take pictures to share.

The next work group meeting is tentatively planned for late August or early September to review preliminary recommendations prior to conducting public workshops. DNR will offer dates for the remaining work group meetings (August/early September, early October and late November/early December) as well as the September public workshops.